



**Directorate of  
Intelligence**

**Secret**

25

# **Pakistan: The Succession Problem**

25

**An Intelligence Assessment**

**MASTER FILE COPY**

**DO NOT GIVE OUT  
OR MARK ON**

**Secret**

*NESA 82-10124  
April 1982*

*Copy* **316**

**Page Denied**



Directorate of  
Intelligence

Secret

25

# Pakistan: The Succession Problem

25

## An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 15 March 1982  
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

This assessment was prepared by [redacted]  
[redacted] of the Office of Near East-South Asia  
Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and  
may be directed to the Chief, South Asia Division,  
NESA, [redacted]

25

25X

25X

This paper was coordinated with the Directorate of  
Operations and with the National Intelligence  
Council, [redacted]

25X

Secret

NESA 82-10124  
April 1982

Secret

25

**Pakistan: The  
Succession Problem**

25

**Key Judgments**

President Zia-ul-Haq faces no immediate threat to his rule, but his sudden death or assassination would be followed in most foreseeable circumstances by the Army's choice of his successor. An acting president—probably the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court—would be appointed quickly, while senior officers in the General Headquarters, martial law secretariat, the corps commands, and provincial martial law administrations decide on a person to take over the posts that are Zia's real bases of power: Chief of the Army Staff and Chief Martial Law Administrator.

25

A military successor to Zia probably would maintain the present relationship with the United States and, unless Islamabad believed Washington's commitment to Pakistan was transitory, would be unlikely to adopt a more flexible position toward the Soviets in Afghanistan.

25

In time the new government might deemphasize Islamization, seek a rapprochement with the opposition parties, and agree to general elections on terms the Army could accept. The Army would ensure, however, that the foreign policies adopted by a civilian government would be consistent with the Army's needs.

25

In the event of massive and sustained popular unrest, the Army probably would replace Zia fairly quickly with a general who could negotiate a political settlement with moderate leaders. Such a government would be likely to continue the present relationship with the United States but would be reluctant to improve ties further.

25

It is also possible—although less likely—that a “populist general” would emerge and seek to co-opt the broad constituency of the Pakistan People's Party by promoting a program of radical reform. In such an event the new regime probably would weaken Pakistan's ties with the United States.

25X1

Secret

NESA 82-10124  
April 1982

**Secret**

25

A revolutionary regime—either of the left or Islamic right—is unlikely in the near future. The radical, Bhutto-led wing of the Pakistan People's Party would have the best—albeit tenuous—opportunity to form a leftist government. Such a regime would deemphasize ties with the United States in favor of closer relations with both Moscow and New Delhi. A rightist, Islamic fundamentalist regime would turn inward and attempt to eliminate Western cultural influences, but it probably would not halt the US-Pakistan arms relationship. [REDACTED]

25

**Secret**

Secret

## Pakistan: The Succession Problem

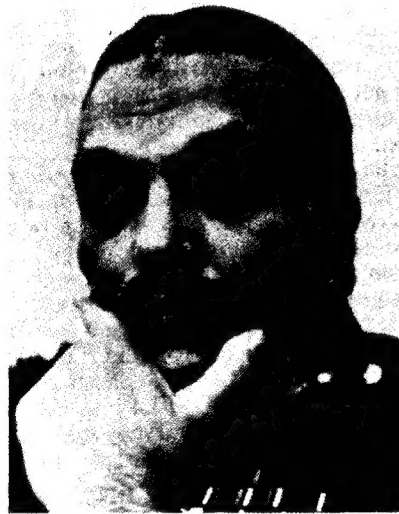
### The Setting

President Zia-ul-Haq faces no immediate threats to his rule. Although he does not dominate the political landscape as did Bhutto or Ayub and lacks a political base outside the Army, he is the key figure in Pakistan. Zia's extensive authority stems from the consolidation of his power in three roles—as Chief of the Army Staff, Chief Martial Law Administrator, and President. He rules through a negative consensus—most Pakistanis dislike him but see no better alternative—which is bolstered by his ability to keep domestic opponents off balance, the economy in good condition, and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan highlighted as a constant threat to the country's security.

Like any leader, however, President Zia could suddenly disappear from the political scene through assassination or illness or be forced to resign if the Army believed he was incapable of governing the country. The Army might remove him if student riots, sectarian disturbances, or the emergence of a mass opposition movement threatened a widespread breakdown of law and order. In his nearly five years in power, Zia has neither built a strong personal constituency nor overcome the widespread sense in Pakistan that his opponents, given the right combination of issues and leadership, would rapidly threaten his regime and force a transition to civilian rule.

Zia attempted in December 1981 to bridge the gap between the martial law regime and the people by creating the Federal Advisory Council, an appointed body of middle-level politicians with no formal powers. Fear of the consequences of relaxing political restrictions probably will restrain Zia from giving the Council genuine power voluntarily, but if the Army continues to press him to return the country to civilian rule, the Council could provide the basis for that transition.

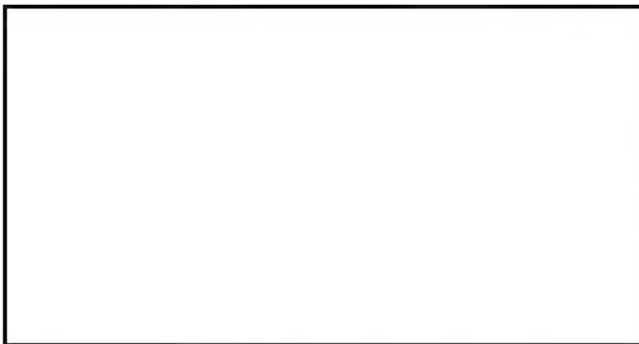
### Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq



*Far Eastern Economic Review* ©

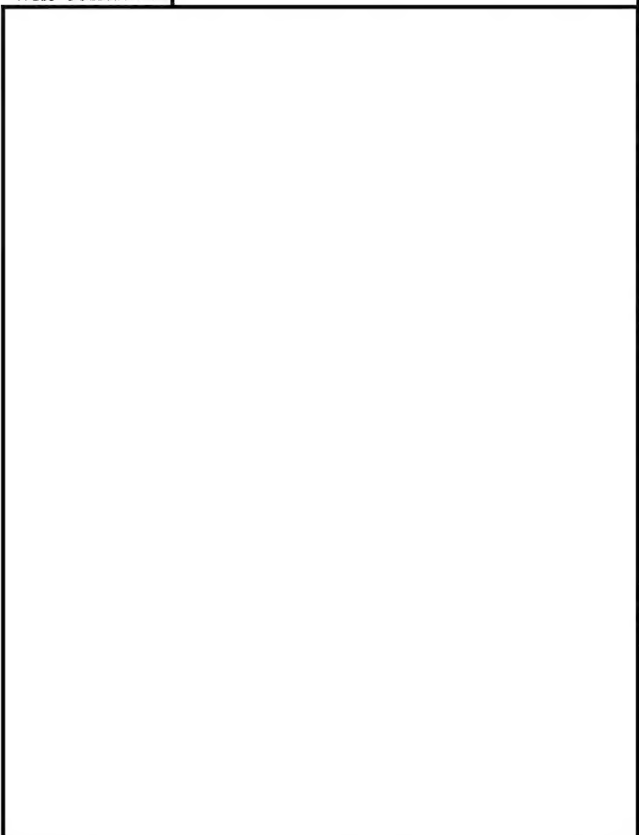
*President, Chief Martial Law Administrator, Army Chief of Staff. Zia, 58, was born in what is now Indian Punjab. After some enlisted service, he was commissioned in the armored corps in 1945. He has served in Jordan and attended two military courses in the United States. He was promoted to lieutenant general in 1975 and to full general and Chief of the Army Staff a year later. He became Chief Martial Law Administrator when he deposed Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in July 1977. Zia appointed himself President when his predecessor resigned voluntarily in 1978. Some have attributed his attempts to institute Islamic reforms to the strong religious influence of his father, a minor government official during the British Raj. Zia's military service has not been outstanding, but he has played Army politics shrewdly. He holds the loyalty of the Army simply because he is its "Chief," and he has gained respect for his adroit handling of threats to the country's integrity. Recently, however, Zia has come under increasing pressure from within the Army to end martial law and return the country to civilian rule.*

Secret



[redacted] Zia's relaxation of press censorship in January led to a flurry of political activity that culminated in mass arrests in early March. Zia postponed the second meeting of the Federal Advisory Council and told the nation that it was not ready for elections. [redacted]

Zia can now claim that major changes are inadvisable while the country is unstable, but pressure from the Army to accommodate to political reality probably will continue. [redacted]



#### **The Army as the Key Interest Group**

The Army holds the key to succession. Its institutional integrity and discipline will guarantee a fairly smooth transition, barring massive civil disturbances. [redacted]

The most important power center within the Army will be the General Headquarters, which is headed in Zia's absence by Gen. Sawar Khan, Army Vice Chief of Staff, and the seven corps commanders, all lieutenant generals. The corps commanders near the capital—X Corps at Rawalpindi and I Corps at Mangla—might have a relatively larger role in influencing the succession. The IV Corps commander at Lahore—astride the main battle front on the Indian border and guardian of the country's premier political and cultural center—also will have an influential voice. [redacted]

After the General Headquarters in importance will be the martial law secretariat, a secondary power center that controls the day-to-day operations of the government. Its military staff, under the direction of Lt. Gen. K. M. Arif, oversees the vast machinery of civil government. Arif probably would use his influence either to improve his own prospects or provide what could be decisive support to another candidate. [redacted]

The provincial governors may have an important, though indirect, role in determining the succession. The governors, who also serve as martial law administrators, probably would have a modest role if Zia replaces them with civilians. With the exception of Rahimuddin in Baluchistan, however, each is now a lieutenant general of considerably more experience and seniority than any of the more recently appointed corps commanders—partly a deliberate move by Zia to keep potential rivals from directly commanding troops. Respect for the governors' military seniority and for their newly demonstrated grasp of regional issues and the workings of government means they will be active in brokering the selection of Zia's

Secret

Secret

**Ghulam Jilani Khan**

Karachi Morning News ©

*Governor of Punjab. Jilani, 58, is the senior serving lieutenant general in the Army. A Punjabi, Jilani was commissioned in the infantry in 1945. He has held several top command and staff assignments and served as Director General of the Interservices Intelligence Directorate from 1971 to 1977. Governor of Pakistan's most populous province, Jilani is an extremely able and sophisticated power broker who is unafraid to put his strong views to Zia. Although he could gain a cabinet appointment if Zia decides to reshuffle his government, the recent arrest of the Governor's military secretary for smuggling could—if the scandal touches Jilani personally—finish his career.*

successor. Further, each of them—Jilani in Punjab, Abbasi in Sind, and Fazle Haq in the North-West Frontier—is a potential alternative to a successor from General Headquarters, particularly if backed by one or more corps commanders or the martial law secretariat. [redacted]

**Sadiq-ul-Rashid Mohammad Abbasi**

Pakistan National Games Magazine, 1980 ©

*Governor of Sind. Abbasi is son of the Nawab of Bahawalpur, ruler of the most important princely state incorporated into Pakistan. Abbasi graduated first in his class at the Pakistan Military Academy and is regarded as a brilliant officer. He was commissioned as an artillery officer, has served as Chief of the General Staff, and was Commander of V Corps. Abbasi has administered the restless Sind Province with admirable political skill. He aspires to be Chief of the Army Staff but is not seen as a front-runner for the job.*

**Other Interest Groups**

Although the Army is likely to be the principal arbiter of power, it will be difficult for anyone to govern the country without the cooperation of the civil servants who run the country on a day-to-day basis. Zia's successor will inherit the extensive civilian bureaucracy that has been the bedrock of government in Pakistan since long before independence. The federal system, though battered, has survived successive martial law regimes. [redacted]

Secret



Secret

**Fazle Haq**

Muslim ©

*Governor of the North-West Frontier Province. Haq, 53, was commissioned in the Pakistan Army in 1948 and is a native of the province he governs. He spent much of his career in the armored corps but commanded an infantry brigade during the Baluchistan insurgency of 1974-77. He graduated from the advanced armor course at Fort Knox, Kentucky, in 1956 and is proud of having competed well against Americans during war games there. Haq is an able mix of soldier, administrator, and politician and is regarded as one of the best governors the NWFP has had. He is a forceful and colorful personality and would have little difficulty developing a strong political following in his home province, if not in Pakistan as a whole.*

Other interest groups are peripheral, and their roles are less easily identifiable, although both the Navy and Air Force high commands would be publicly associated with any succession decision reached by the Army. A relatively small elite, comprising the military, the civil bureaucracy, the police, judiciary, landed gentry, and urban industrial interests, dominates Pakistani society. We expect that members of

the elite will exercise influence behind the scenes through linkages based on money, land, old school ties, clan, tribe, and family. Retired generals now in business or public corporations will make themselves heard as they have in past successions. [REDACTED]

It is unlikely that any political figure or member of the intelligentsia will be directly involved while the Army controls the succession. Still, the Army would consult representatives of the Islamic right—the Jama'at-i-Islami party in particular—to ensure that the religious parties and their volatile student supporters are not offended by the result. [REDACTED]

**The Succession**

Whether Zia dies suddenly or is overthrown by a mass uprising, an Army general probably will succeed him. The process of selecting Zia's successor, however, depends on how he departs the scene. Were he to die unexpectedly, the succession probably would be closely held within the Army establishment. An uprising would force his successor to negotiate a political settlement with opposition leaders. [REDACTED]

Zia so far has kept the question of succession vague by dividing his authority among several officials when he leaves the country. The succession issue gained some prominence a year ago when Zia promulgated the Provisional Constitutional Order, which provided for two vice presidents—the senior being designated the successor to the president. Zia has filled neither position, although he may be considering such appointments as part of his plan to move eventually toward a civilian regime. [REDACTED]

Zia will approach civilianization and the succession warily because both involve delicate issues of promotion and retirement. As Chief of the Army Staff, Zia has played Army politics shrewdly, retiring or sidetracking several senior officers who opposed his policies and filling their positions with supporters. Nonetheless, Zia has never dominated the Army as

Secret

Secret

President—and Field Marshal—Ayub Khan did in the 1960s. Zia depends on senior officers in the General Headquarters, the corps commands, the martial law secretariat, and the provincial governorships to undergird his regime. [REDACTED]

These groups, together with influential cabinet members like the Finance Minister and the Foreign Minister, meet monthly in Rawalpindi and constitute the real policymaking council of the regime. Although Foreign Minister Agha Shahi resigned in February 1982, his successor Yaqub Khan—a retired general with 10 years' ambassadorial experience—probably will command at least as much influence on policy. The military will view Yaqub more favorably than the wily civil servant Shahi, whom many generals distrust. [REDACTED]

Zia's extended term as Chief of the Army Staff was supposed to expire in March, but the recent domestic unrest may have given him the leverage to reappoint himself quietly or at least to continue in office until the agitation eases. An extension of his term almost certainly will meet opposition from the Army, which has complained before of the disruption in the normal promotion cycle—a frequent occurrence since Zia took power. [REDACTED]

#### **Rahimuddin Khan**



Muslim ©

*Governor of Baluchistan and Commander of II Corps. Rahimuddin, 56, is a member of one of the most prominent Muslim families that moved from India to Pakistan in 1947. An uncle who remained behind became President of India. Commissioned in the infantry in 1948, he received training in the United States in the mid-1960s. Before his promotion to lieutenant general in 1978, he was Chief of the General Staff. He is loyal to Zia, who is a personal friend and a relative by marriage, and is Zia's personal choice to be the next Chief of the Army Staff. He is regarded as a capable officer by his colleagues, but an attempt to make him Chief of the Army Staff could run into charges of nepotism.*

Secret

Secret

### Sawar Khan



Muslim ©

*Vice Chief of the Army Staff. Sawar, 57, is a Punjabi and longtime associate of Zia. He served as Governor of Punjab and Commander of IV Corps at Lahore from 1978 until he replaced Iqbal as Deputy Army Chief in April 1980. As Deputy Chief, Sawar is the second most powerful figure in the Army but is regarded as politically unambitious and loyal to Zia. Though not an unusually gifted officer, Sawar has a reputation as a thoroughly capable soldier. He has largely stayed out of the limelight and concentrates on the day-to-day running of the Army. Recently, however, rumors have circulated of his involvement in corrupt activities.*

Zia's second choice probably would be Gen. Sawar Khan, an apolitical officer and Zia supporter. A corps commander such as Lt. Gen. S. F. S. Khan Lodhi, Commander of IV Corps at Lahore, is also plausible—this position has been the traditional springboard to the position of Army Chief of Staff. A darkhorse candidate is Lt. Gen. K. M. Arif, who runs the federal bureaucracy through the martial law secretariat, where he serves as chief of staff to Zia in

the latter's role as Chief Martial Law Administrator. Arif is regarded as the most skilled bureaucratic player in Islamabad. He wants a corps command, and he recently tried unsuccessfully to resign as Zia's chief of staff. He has also supported negotiations between the martial law administration and the opposition political parties. [REDACTED]

If the vice presidency remains vacant, the succession process will be uncertain. In the wake of Zia's sudden removal, a collegium of senior Army officers probably would quickly appoint an acting president in order to maintain constitutional continuity. A likely candidate would be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Following such an appointment, the succession to Zia's other two positions—Army Chief of Staff and Chief Martial Law Administrator—would be worked out within the Army and probably would go to the same general. [REDACTED]

Secret

Secret

**Muhammad Iqbal Khan**

Muslim ©

*Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. Iqbal, a 55-year-old Punjabi, is the son of a noncommissioned officer and has spent his entire life in the military. He was commissioned in 1946, has been director of Army intelligence, and served in the Army's senior staff post. He was promoted to lieutenant general in 1976 and given command of IV Corps at Lahore. In 1977 his reluctance to use force against anti-Bhutto demonstrators in this politically crucial city was an important factor in bringing down the Bhutto regime. Iqbal was made Vice Chief of the Army Staff in 1978, but disagreements with Zia on a number of issues led the President to transfer him in 1980 to the more prestigious but less powerful post as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. Iqbal is widely admired in the Army.*

In either scenario there might be an initial period of power sharing. Only General Iqbal has enough support in the Army to consolidate his power and emerge rapidly as more than an interim successor.

**A Radical Alternative**

Politics in Pakistan will continue to be characterized by long periods of relative stability, broken by short periods of mass protest which, as in the past, probably will result in abrupt changes of government. President Ayub Khan in 1969 and Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1977 were both removed by the Army after intense political movements of four to five months' duration. The sudden emergence of a mass movement against Zia or of a conservative military successor is always a possibility, although for now external threats and periodic crackdowns have preserved Zia's position.

The ideological left in Pakistan is small and sharply fragmented and by itself has no chance of gaining power. It could acquire influence only by attaching itself to a more populist movement like the radical wing of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Most Pakistanis are conservative, respect authority, and accept basic social change only if they believe it is consistent with Islam.

The radical wing of the PPP, led by Bhutto's widow and daughter, is the group most capable of mounting a mass opposition movement from the left, but its problems of poor organization, public apathy, and ineffective leadership show little prospect for change. The PPP has also been damaged by the activities of the Bhutto sons; the eldest, Murtaza, leads the Kabul-based Al Zulfikar terrorist group. Nevertheless, the Bhutto wing of the party retains the support of many poor Pakistanis and could reemerge as a contender for power if there is an economic downturn that brings people into the streets or if Zia otherwise blunders badly.

The Islamic right in Pakistan is a growing force but, like the left, is weakened by its inability to coalesce around a single leader. The religious parties' effective student organization could mount strong opposition to a government it opposed, but theological splits and

Secret

**Secret**

rivalries frustrate unity efforts. Most Pakistanis are Sunni Muslims and, as such, are less susceptible to the inflammatory rhetoric characteristic of Shia Islam. Nonetheless, the Islamic right played a major role in destabilizing the Bhutto regime, particularly in the urban areas. The combination of social discontent and clerical agitation occasionally has been explosive in Pakistan. Some influential elements of the clergy are becoming disillusioned with the slow pace of Zia's Islamization program and could offer the President growing opposition. [REDACTED]

#### **Implications for the United States**

Pakistan's present foreign policy has broad support in the Army and the elite and probably would not be abruptly changed by a military successor to Zia. Over time Islamabad might modify its policies toward the United States and toward the Soviets in Afghanistan, but such shifts may occur even if Zia remains in control. [REDACTED]

relationship against its view that, historically, the United States has been unreliable. Pakistan's willingness to further improve relations with Washington will depend on its judgment of the durability of the US commitment to assist Pakistan in resisting Soviet pressures. If the Army becomes dissatisfied with the United States, the ouster of a leader committed to improving ties with Washington would allow his successor to reevaluate and possibly downgrade the relationship. [REDACTED]

Although less likely, the emergence of a "populist general" should not be ruled out, particularly if mass protest topples the present regime. Such a figure—provided he had charismatic qualities—might succeed in attracting the PPP rank and file by a program of radical social reform and a neutralist or leftist foreign policy. These policies would find support among a section of the intelligentsia and among some junior Army officers. [REDACTED]

A radical regime in Pakistan—right or left—would attempt to alter significantly Zia's foreign policy. Statements of PPP leaders indicate that at least the party's radical wing would move to downgrade relations with the United States, accept the reality of Indian hegemony in South Asia, and attempt to weaken Pakistan's Army. The PPP itself probably

Pakistan is reserving its long-term policy options, but any changes toward the United States in the event of a military succession probably would follow a perception that Washington had failed to support Islamabad. Pakistan will continue to cautiously evaluate the

**Secret**

Secret

would recognize the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul, look to Moscow for substantial economic and military aid, and put pressure on the Afghan refugees to return home—an extremely delicate and probably impractical task. [REDACTED]

25

A regime of the Islamic right would remain committed to opposing the Soviets in Afghanistan and to resisting New Delhi's regional ambitions. It would assume an even stronger identity with the Muslim world—particularly Saudi Arabia and the Gulf—and probably would deemphasize relations with the United States, though not to the point of forfeiting US arms and economic aid. There is a significant strain of anti-Westernism among Pakistani clerics, who see Western society as materialistic and morally bankrupt. They would seek to limit Western cultural influences, but they are pragmatic enough to realize that only the United States has sufficient economic and military power to counter Soviet ambitions in the area. [REDACTED]

25

Secret

**Secret**

**Secret**